

APRIL, 1951

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APRIL
1951

35¢



BEYOND THE FEARFUL FOREST

By Geoff St. Reynard

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1951

VOLUME 2
NUMBER 2



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Front cover photo dyed print by Malcolm Smith, illustrating
"Beyond The Fearful Forest"

Published bi-monthly by Greenleaf Publishing Company, 1426 Fowler Avenue, Evanston, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at the post office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio. Address all manuscripts, subscriptions, and correspondence to Editorial Office: P.O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill. We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts, photographs, or artwork.

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NOT IN THE RULES

By Mack Reynolds

A planet's strength was determined in the Arena where brute force emerged victorious. But the Earthman chose a forgotten weapon—strategy!



The Earthman drew deliberate attention to himself by rushing into the thick of the

Not only from Suzi, but from Alger Wilde, who was also along. Yeah, between them they'd ridden me as well as the liner, all the way from Terra.

I handed the Martie a kopek and put the yellow envelope in my pocket, as though I was used to getting spacegrams.

I said to Suzi, "Let's hit the chow

line." I don't usually talk that fancy, but I was trying to impress her with my knowledge of antique phrases. Both Suzi and Alger Wilde are students of ancient times and love to lard their conversation with such stuff.

Suzi said, "Sure, Jak. Come on Alger," which wasn't what I'd meant at all. And then she said, "Aren't



battle, his blade slashing viciously. And a roar went up from the crowd . . .

you going to open that spacegram, Jak? It might be important."

"Probably is," I said carelessly. "But it can wait, whatever it is."

And it did. I opened it after we'd ordered at the spaceport restaurant. I should have waited until after I'd eaten, but I couldn't know that until I read:

SPACER TRANSPORTING
GLADIATOR EARTH-MARS
FOR INTER - PLANETARY
GAMES LOST. YOU HAVE
BEEN APPOINTED EMER-
GENCY REPLACEMENT
REPRESENTING EARTH.
GOOD LUCK.

I gulped. If you don't know all about the Interplanetary Meet which is held every decade, then maybe you don't know why I gulped. If you do, you do. It's tough enough being a gladiator on Terra but at least you have a chance of coming out alive; you've even got a chance of winning. But at the Interplanetary Meet! Who ever heard of a Terran coming out in one piece? Not to speak of winning.

Sure, I'm a gladiator, but I've always been strictly a second rater; in fact, some of the sports writers call me a third rater. Anyway, I've always worked in the smaller meets where the gladiators, even when they lose, usually get off with their lives. In the small town stuff, they don't kill expensive gladiators, if they can help it.

My head was doing double flips trying to figure out some way of

making myself scarce, when Suzi said, "What is it, Jak?"

Like a fool, I handed the message to her and she and Alger read it together.

Suzi's eyes widened and she started to say something, worriedly, but Alger stuck out his hand and said, "Congratulations, Jak. I knew you had great things in you. Now they'll be coming out . . . Er . . . That is, just think, one of the three gladiators representing Terra. What an honor!"

I was sunk.

The Interplanetary Meet was just three days off and I had three days to live.

I wouldn't have been on Mars in the first place if it hadn't been for an argument I had with Suzi back on Terra just before she was scheduled to blast off for Mars to cover the Interplanetary Games. Suzi is a sports reporter, see. She covers the meets from the woman's angle. What she really wanted to do was write books about primitive culture; and what I wanted her to do was spend the rest of her life being my wife. Neither of us seemed to have much of a chance of making good.

As usual, Suzi was giving me *kert*. If you'll pardon my language. "I don't know why I bother with you, Jak," she said scowling. "You've had the book a week and don't know a thing about it. You're nothing but a drip, a square."

"Listen," I said resentfully. "Don't use those mythological terms on me. Last time it took me all day to look them up. Besides, I try don't I? My manager's going crazy because I've been spending so much time reading instead of training for my next meet."

You get the idea. The girl was just gone on the ancients. She wouldn't have tolerated me for an hour if I hadn't been willing to let her cram her nonsense into me at every opportunity.

"How long do you expect to be on Mars?" I asked her.

She shrugged. "Perhaps three months, Terra time."

"Three months!"

She patted my hand. "Don't worry about me, Jak. I'm taking along an extensive micro-film library dealing with the literature and drama of Twentieth Century North America. As you undoubtedly know, it reached its height in the comic books and cartoon movies of the time. Besides," she went on, "Alger Wilde will be there, covering the meet from the society angle. He'll be good company. Alger is quite an authority on prehistoric literature."

"And also on today's women," I yelped. "You didn't tell me that *makron* was going to be on Mars with you."

She held her hands over her ears and said indignantly, "Please, Jak, save your vulgarities for the games."

"I'm going with you," I grated.

"I don't trust that guy with my woman."

She flared up at that. "Your woman! Let me tell you, Jak Demsi, when you begin to display the cultural achievements of Alger Wilde, you may begin, just begin, mind you, to think of me as your woman, as you so crudely put it. Meanwhile, I have no desire to link myself with an ignoramus. Besides, I'm beginning to believe that you have no interest in cultural pursuits. You've merely deceived me these past months with pretended . . ."

"Aw, Suzi," I began.

I had trouble enough raising credits for my fare, but more still getting last minute reservations on the crowded excursion liner to Mars. It took some string pulling on my manager's part to get me the tickets. Nobody who can raise the credits would dream of missing the Interplanetary Meet, and every spacer to Mars was packed.

Suzi was surprised when I stepped up to her table in the spacer's lounge. At least, her eyebrows raised. The little minx was as pretty as a Venusian rose-orchid. She was sitting with Alger Wilde, a *makron* from the word *glorm*.

"Hi," I said, using a prehistoric formal salutation in hopes of pleasing her with my knowledge of olden times.

"By Jove," Alger Wilde exclaimed. "if it isn't Jak Demsi." He add-

ed, smirking, "Pardon the expression. Jove was an ancient deity. I sometimes slip and use such terms."

Did he think I was stupid? Hadn't I been reading up on all that stuff for months? I sat down casually in an empty acceleration chair.

"Of course," I said. "An Egyptian God; also known as Jupiter by their neighbors, the Aztecs, and by the name of Zeus, by the Chinese."

And that's the way it was all the way to Mars. I tried to hang on and stick it out with them, but I came in a bad third. I was fighting out of my class. In fact, just before we arrived on Mars, Suzi made it plain that she thought I might as well give up my attempts to become cultured. She said I just didn't assimilate the stuff, that it didn't come off on me. I could read whole libraries of the ancient classics and recall none of the significance of what I'd read. In short, I wasn't doing so good with Suzi.

* * *

Well, three days after getting the telegram, I met the other two gladiators from Terra in our dressing room at the arena. They weren't much happier about the meet than I was. -

It's one of the occupational hazards of our trade. If you get too good, you'll probably be chosen as Terra representative to the Interplanetary Meet and your chances

of surviving are almost nil. Of course, the pay is high and your survivors get a big chunk of credits but it's a chilly prospect at best.

The other two were pretty well armored and had chosen spears as weapons, but I left off all armor and took a short sword. I planned on moving fast and the less weight I carried the better.

When the various preliminaries were over and the crowd shouting for the main event, we trotted out to the field, joined the gladiators from the other planets and paraded toward the stand at which the judges and diplomats were seated. There was a mob of these, each with his assistants and secretaries. You could bet that little that happened would miss them. After all, on this meet hung the destinies of planets.

Thousands of spectators from every planet and every principal satellite in the system stared down from their arena seats. I knew that the majority of them had expended a fortune in transport from their homes and for tickets to the meet. But why not! It was the equivalent of having a box seat at a full scale war of the type held in legendary times. Certainly, the ultimate effect was as great or greater. Each spectator knew that upon the manner in which their planet's representatives fought this day, their fates depended.

THE planets have long since abolished war, but they put great

store by these Interplanetary Meets. The theory is: Why fight a war and kill off billions of population when you can figure out before the fighting ever takes place who'd win? It's the natural ultimate development of diplomacy. Everything is settled by the diplomats without resorting to armed conflict.

Suppose, for instance, that Mars decided to assume domination of Terra. She notes, as do the Terran diplomats, that, - at the Interplanetary Meet, the Martian gladiators wiped up on those from Terra. Obviously, if the same fighting would take place on a gigantic scale the same thing would result. So why fight the war? Terra simply accepts the domination. Of course, it's all done in very diplomatic language so that nobody loses face, but the results are the same.

As a matter of fact, I'm surprised that one of the other planets hasn't already taken over Terra. The most recent addition to the League of Solar System Planets, we're by far the weakest. Probably our strongest defense has been the fact that several different League members have had their eyes upon us and each has counteracted the other. It's certain that Venus, Saturn, and even Pluto would like to assimilate Terra. Actually, any one of them could do it.

As is customary, a beauty from the planet upon which the meet is being held, a Martian Princess in this case, opened the main event by

throwing out the prize. It was a tremendous Venusian emerald, the largest ever discovered and the size of a man's hand. It doesn't really make much difference who catches the prize, except that it's considered to be a lucky sign; the gladiator who survives the contest is the one who finally takes it.

I could see Suzi in the press box, sitting next to Alger. She seemed pale. I thought I might as well show her that some of the stuff she'd given me to read had been remembered. So just before the Princess tossed out the emerald and while the others stood about nervously and impatient, I drew my sword, flourished it, and called out, "We who are about to die, salute you!"

The Martian Princess smiled down at me. "Good fortune to you, gladiator from Terra," she said, and deliberately threw the stone.

I'd just as well she hadn't. The man with the prize is always the center of conflict and to have a hundred or so of the most efficient killers in the system out after you is no way to live to a ripe old age.

But I caught the emerald and the battle was on. I'd hardly got it into my belt before I heard a swish and a Mercurian *Bouncer*, the steel knives on his heels flashing, missed me by a fraction of an inch. Before it could jump again, a four armed Martian pierced it with a javelin. The Martian went down in his turn under a crushing blow

from a *Slaber*.

I ran backward quickly, knowing that where there's one *Bouncer* there's another. They fight in a group of twenty or thirty.

SOMETIMES I wonder about that rule. Each planet is represented in the final free-for-all, the climax of the Interplanetary Meet, by weight. The Mercurians, who are about the size of Terran chickens, have thirty gladiators in the battle. The group from Calypso numbers eight, and looks like a gang of human dwarfs. Jupiter and Saturn have only one representative each because of their gigantic size. Mars has four, Terra three. The others have varying numbers.

The other two gladiators from Terra tried to cover me, but went down in the rush. The first fell victim to the heavy, ponderous and nearly weapon proof gladiator from Saturn, victor of the last Interplanetary Meet. The Terran tried to run in close, beneath the other's guard, but was smashed with a sweeping blow that broke half the bones in his body. The crowd cheered for the nice try, and the Saturnian brandished his half ton club again and peered about nearsightedly for another enemy.

My second companion in arms had an arm severed near the shoulder by a fast moving Plutonian *Gadaboot*. He fell to the ground bleeding profusely. At least, he'd probably survive and get back to

Terra.

I had seconds to live. As I said, we Terrans don't show up so well in the games. The gladiators from *any* planet can take us. Oh, I don't mean that a Terran couldn't defeat *one* Mercurian *Bouncer*, or *one* Calypso *Dwoorf*, but face our three Terrans with the whole Calypso, or the whole Mercurian delegation and we don't last very long.

I had seconds to live. They were all centering toward me, taking side swipes at one another if the opportunity allowed, but heading for me.

Ordinarily, before a contest, my manager fills me full of last minute advice and instructions; but I'd hardly seen him in the past few months. I'd been too busy reading Suzi's books about the ancients. I was on my own.

I didn't have time to figure it out. It just happened automatically. I remembered something and before I had time to place the memory, I had taken the emerald from my belt, held it up momentarily so they could all see it, and yelled, "For the greatest fighter of all," and threw it into the midst of them.

Later, I recalled a guy in one of Suzi's books having done something similar, except I believe he yelled, "For the fairest," and threw a golden apple. At any rate, the result seemed to be about the same. That guy started the Trojan War.

It gave me a breathing spell. They piled on one another until I thought that the meet would end

then and there. A Venusian spiderman bent to pick up the emerald and had five of his limbs and his head cut off before he could straighten again. A *Gadaboot* grabbed it and tried to dart out of the crush but ran into the darting rapier of a Uranian. Rising dust swirled up and enveloped the rest.

In moments, the fight had settled down into a series of individual combats all over the field.

I could see the slow moving *Slaber* from Jupiter stalking about weaponless, seizing and crushing all with whom he came in contact. I could see the Mercurian *Bouncers* dying like flies, but killing their share and more of opponents with the razor sharp spurs attached to their feet. They would fling themselves high into the air and come down from above, heels slashing death.

I had no more time to observe. Five remaining Calypso *Dwoorfs* disengaged themselves from a fight centering about two Venusians, spied me, and dashed in my direction.

ORDINARILY, the Calypso gladiators would be even weaker than we Terrans, but they have the advantage of a universal mind. That is, they think together. Each knows what every other *Dwoorf* is thinking; it goes beyond mere mental telepathy. They act as though they were a single individual. Talk about team work! You get three or four

of them about you, all working in complete and perfect harmony, and you're sunk.

I groaned for my manager's advice again and resigned myself. When they got within fifteen feet of me they opened their mouths and cried in unison. "Prepare to die, Terran *makron*."

For a second that did it. I raised my short sword and started toward them. They spread out like a fan to encircle me. Once again I didn't consciously figure it out. The idea came spontaneously with my acting upon it. I just suddenly turned on my heel and started to run. They followed me like a pack.

I'd gotten halfway across the arena and could hear the thousands in the arena seats booing me like thunder, before it came back to me what I'd read. It was a trick some gladiator from Rome or Greece had pulled once. I looked over my shoulder. Sure enough, they were still coming, but now they were strung out in a line. The fastest runner of them all was only a short distance behind me, the slowest, quite a ways back. The other three were in between at varying distances.

This next is going to sound like it took some time but actually it was all over in split seconds.

I stopped, whirled, and said tightly to the one pressing me, "Who's calling who a *makron* now?" At the same time my sword parried his and ripped into his unprotected bel-

ly. He died, his eyes wide with surprise and pain.

I hardly had time to disengage my sword before the second *Dwoorf* was upon me. I dropped to one knee and slashed upward cutting completely through his right arm. The arm fell to the ground, his hand still clutching the three pronged javelin with which he'd expected to spit me. He screamed in agony and stumbled away hopelessly trying to staunch the flow of blood with his left hand.

The third came running up, both hands high over his head, ready to bring down his battle ax. I kicked him savagely with a spiked shoe, cracking a knee and bringing him to the ground. I could have finished him then and there but didn't have the time. The fourth, yelling like a maniac, slashed into me, his blade ripping my right arm from elbow to shoulder. He brought up his sword for another stroke.

I was short winded from the long run across the arena and from the fast action of the past few moments. I drew all my strength together and lunged desperately forward. My sword pierced his throat. He fell, writhing, taking my blade with him.

I stood up wearily to confront the fifth one. My arm was bleeding freely and I had no weapon nor time to get one.

He came shouting, raging with bloodlust and desire for revenge. His arm flew back for the javelin

cast when a Plutonian *Gadaboot* shot out from a nearby melee and struck him from the rear. The *Dwoorf* collapsed, bleeding his life away in moments. The *Gadaboot* straightened up, shrilling its death whistle, preparatory to darting at me, but a Mercurian *Bouncer*, wounded and fluttering, came down from above and made a last desperate stroke. They died together.

I shook my head to clear it, and reached down to disengage my sword from the neck of the fallen *Dwoorf* I'd killed last. I looked about. There were no others near me.

For a moment there was a breathing spell. In the past ten minutes, two thirds of the contestants had either died or had been carried off the field incapacitated. Those of us that remained were wounded but still in the fight. As I stood there staggering, panting, aching, it occurred to me that never before had a Terran lasted so long in an Interplanetary Meet.

As though by common consent, we all gravitated toward the center of the arena. This was it. In the next few moments the contest would be over.

And so would I.

As I stumbled forward, a wounded Martian staggered to his feet and made a half-hearted stab at me. I bypassed him. He was too far gone to fight. Shortly, the judges' assistants would get to him ~

and take him from the field; possibly he'd have a chance to survive. I had no desire to finish him off. In fact, I envied him.

We were quiet momentarily; and so was the crowd. A hush hung over the whole arena. I noted in seconds that among the survivors were two of the four limbed Martians, half a dozen *Bouncers*, the gigantic *Slaber* from Jupiter, one of the Calypso *Dwoorfs* almost helpless now that his fellows were all gone, three or four *Gadaboos*, and a Venusian spiderman.

I wondered vaguely if my namesake, that gladiator of the fabulous days of the legendary United States, the original Jak Demsi, had ever found himself in a spot like this. I suppose that he had, possibly worse. Suzi, who gave me the name, saying that it would be good for publicity, claimed he was one of the greatest of all. I shook my head again, trying to clear it, my loss of blood making me faint.

And then it broke. The dust swirled high as we rushed together. I felt a crushing blow, tried to deal one back, was struck again by the ponderous gladiator from Jupiter and was thrown heavily to the ground.

I tried to push myself to my knees, my already bloody sword still in hand, still at the ready. I was in the center of the crush. This was the end. Suzi flashed before my mind.

Well, there was a tremendous

controversy afterward and I was brought before the judges and the diplomats more like a prisoner than the victor of the Interplanetary Meet. I was laden down with bandages and weak from loss of blood but they didn't look in the least sympathetic, not even the judge and diplomats from Terra.

They got right to the point.

The Martian judge, as senior, since the meet was taking place on his planet, acted as spokesman. He was excited and indignant and would wave three or four of his arms at a time to emphasize his point. I thought vaguely of one of the olden time windmills I'd seen pictured in one of Suzi's books.

"Gladiator Jak Demsi," he rapped, "Our tendency is to rule your conduct in the affray so unbecoming that not only will the prize not be awarded you, as last standing contestant on the field, but we are considering . . ."

I wasn't having any. After coming through that scrap, I wasn't ever figuring on taking a back seat again. I interrupted him, growling, "I'm willing to stand behind anything I did in the arena on the grounds that it was compatible with Terran custom and therefore allowable on the part of a Terran gladiator."

The Venusian judge sneered, without bothering to say anything; the Plutonian tittered his disbelief; the Terran judge blinked at me, shocked by my words.

I was getting mad. "In the press box, you'll find two reporters from Terra. Bring them here. They are both students of Terran history and ancient custom and will support what I say."

Suzi and Alger Wilde were located and brought before us after a brief debate between the judges. By their appearance, it was obvious that the press box boys had similar ideas to those of the judges. Suzi showed signs of concern about my wounds but she also half indicated that I was a leper. There was no *half* about it as far as Alger Wilde was concerned.

"You might have died like a man, Demsi," he said sharply, "instead of bringing disgrace to Terra."

The Martian judge said coldly, "This gladiator claims that his astounding actions in the arena were excusable on the grounds that everything he did is in accord with Terran customs and, consequently, permissible by the rules of the Interplanetary Meet."

Suzi's eyes widened. Alger Wilde began to protest.

I didn't give them a chance to deny anything. "Just what are the complaints?" I asked the judge.

"As though they weren't obvious," he snorted, beginning to wave his arms again. "First, your trick of throwing the emerald, the Princess was so kind to honor you with, into the midst of the others and thus diverting the strife from yourself. This was an act of——"

"Strategy," I interrupted him. "The custom is to be found in Terran history. An old maxim of the Sioux Indians was 'Divide and Conquer.' That's what I did. I got my opponents to fighting among themselves so that I could defeat them easier."

"The Romans, not the Sioux Indians," Alger muttered.

"Then you mean that this was actually a maxim of Terra?" the judge said in surprise. I could see the other judges and diplomats, including those from earth, were as shocked as the Martian.

"Well, yes," Suzi told him. "Of course, they usually didn't use quite the method that Jak did. . . ."

The judge snorted again. "Be that as it may, I don't see how Demsi can justify his fleeing before the Calypso gladiators like a common coward. Meet rules are that each gladiator must fight any who oppose him."

Suzi shot a worried look at me.

"Right in accord with Terran history and custom," I said decisively. "For one thing, it was always a basic rule with a Terran general to choose the battlefield where the fight was to be joined. It was considered a major advantage. Another maxim was, 'Git there fustest, with the mostest.' I merely ran to the ground that best suited me, and then, when the Calypso *Dwoorfs* were no longer the mostest, I fought them one at a time."

The judge raised his eyes ques-

tioningly at Alger and was rewarded with a grudging nod.

THE Martian shook his head as though in disbelief but went on. "Those two matters you have explained, surprisingly, but acceptably. But to this last charge there can be no possible honorable background in Terran custom. I refer to the fact that in the final conflict *you fell as though dead and remained on the ground until the other contestants had all but eliminated each other*. When only the badly wounded *Slaber* and the half dead Venusian gladiator remained, you got up again and, reentering the fight, finished off these opponents."

The judge threw up his four hand in horror. "Certainly, you can't claim justification for that! Not on any grounds, not by and. . ."

I stood up as straight and defiantly as my heavy bandages would allow. "Listen," I growled. "It's one of the oldest traditions of Terra. It's called PLAYING POSSUM."

For a full minute silence fell on the whole group. Then I could hear one diplomat whisper questioningly to another, "*Playing possum?* What does that mean?"

And then with one of the most outstanding bits of pure statesmanship the system has even seen, Suzi took up the cue and spoke in collaboration.

"He's quite right. Playing pos-

sum is in full accord with Terran custom. Why," she added innocently, "earth always acts in that manner. She pretends she's weak, helpless, someone to be ignored; and, then, suddenly, and without warning, she shows her full strength."

The various judges and diplomats shot glances at each other from the sides of their eyes, especially those from Venus, Saturn, and Pluto.

The Terran judge was no *makron*. When somebody yelled *glorm* he knew enough to grab the *gaboot* and run with it. He looked at Suzi and I severely. "Say no more, either of you. You are not here to reveal Terran secrets."

The other diplomats eyed each other again, nervously.

The Martian judge, more genial now, said, "Undoubtedly, a mistake has been made due to our lack of knowledge of Terran customs and practices. The emerald shall be awarded the Terran gladiator, Jak Demsi, as soon as it is found. It is undoubtedly still in the arena in the possession of some slain contestant."

I took it from my belt. "As a matter of fact, I have it here. I picked it up while playing possum under that heap of corpses. It's an old custom handed down from a Terran city named Brooklyn. 'When you see something that ain't nailed down, latch onto it.'"

Alger Wilde left the room hur-

riedly, followed hand in hand by Suzi and I. It was time for the diplomats to begin their wrangling, the wrangling that would settle the fate of worlds. As we passed through the door, I could see the

anticipation on the faces of the diplomats from Terra.

From what I heard later, they must have given the other diplomats *kert*. If you'll pardon my language.

THE END

Secret Science

A few months ago, a prominent national magazine requested an interestingly written popular article on atomic energy from an internationally famous American scientist. It got the article and went to work preparing it for publication. After editorial work and makeup the magazine went to press and in a short time thousands of copies had been printed preparatory to going to subscribers and the news stands.

But then the Atomic Energy Commission got hold of a copy of the magazine. Moving like lightning, the A.E.C. clamped a confiscatory order on the printed magazines and stopped the presses. It ordered all copies of the article destroyed. There was nothing to do but comply.

Then the repercussions began. The article was rewritten, the material which offended the A.E.C. removed, and the magazine went to press without further interruption. But the howl against censorship began. The scientist who had written the article painstakingly pointed out to the members of the Commission that nothing he had written the first time could not be found anywhere

else. It was common knowledge, he claimed.

The Atomic Energy Commission answered its attackers with a reasonable reply. They said that if they were sure war was coming soon, they'd clamp absolute secrecy on everything. But they admitted that if they knew war wasn't coming within thirty years, they'd abandon secrecy entirely!

Its hard for us on the sidelines to judge whether this type of censorship is right or not, but we've got a feeling that it's unnecessary and harmful to our real efforts. In spite of all, the hedges and guards erected during wartime, it seems that the major combatants, industrially of the same caliber, generally produce weapons and counter-weapons one right after the other.

Meanwhile during peactime, any secrecy efforts at all seem to hurt the country's own scientists more than anyone. Right now, there are hundreds of atomic energy projects in the U.S., many of which do not know what is going on in their own field at some other institution. A scientist working on atomic energy at